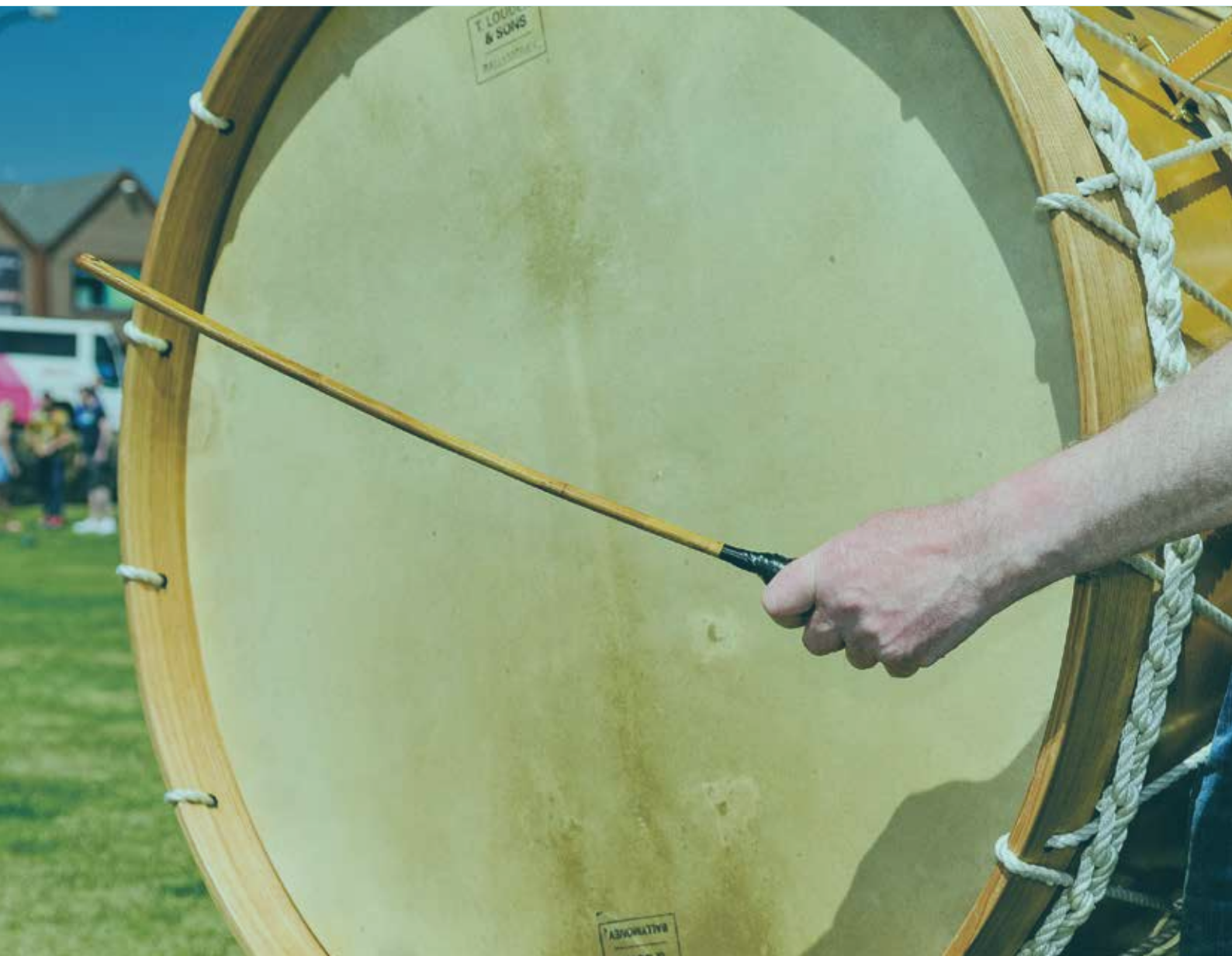


# Get to Grips

with the **Lambeg Drum**





## Foreword

Music tradition is a very important aspect of Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and identity.

The lambeg drum is one of the loudest percussion instruments in the world and is unique to Ulster. The traditions associated with the making, painting and playing the Lambeg drum are important aspects of our Ulster-Scots culture and heritage.

The rhythms used have names that reflect the local nature of the tradition. Names like 'Kellswater Time' and 'Tandragee Time' demonstrate the close links between places in Ulster and the Lambeg drumming tradition.

The Ulster-Scots Agency supports the drumming community and helps develop new talent and skills through tuition programmes and support, ensuring a vibrant future of this tradition. The rich Ulster-Scots music heritage is to be celebrated whether your interest is in learning to play or just enjoying the listening and cultural experience.

This book is one of a series that supports the Ulster-Scots Agency music tuition programmes. There are opportunities for the young and not so young to enjoy the experience of learning new drumming skills and I trust that this book will help you on that journey, supported by expert tutors and tuition programmes provided by the Ulster-Scots Agency.

**Richard Hanna**

Director of Education and Language

Your Name .....

## 1. History and Background of the Lambeg Drum



Drums have been a major part of European armies from around the **13th century**, where they were used to keep large groups of soldiers marching at a steady speed. These drums were more like **field drums** (pictured below) and would resemble a modern-day **snare drum**, without the snare of course.

As well as this, they were often used to rally the troops for battle and, in some cases, demoralise the enemy with their mighty sound.

We believe that slightly larger drums arrived in **Ireland** along with **William, Prince of Orange** in the late **1600s**. His best soldiers were called **the Dutch Blues**, and we think it was these specific soldiers who used drums in this manner.





Later on, armies took up **flutes** or **fifes** to be used along with the drums. These small wooden fifes were usually played in the musical pitch of either **Bb** or **C#**. This became the standard arrangement in European armies for around 500 years.



The Lambeg drum is an **indigenous** instrument, meaning it is found **nowhere else** in the world. The summary table on the next page shows current fife and drum exposure and popularity across Northern Ireland, and if there is any recognised drumming association present. A **drumming association** is a group of Lambeg drum enthusiasts who come together on a weekly basis.



**Yes** means a large exposure.

**No** means a very small exposure or none at all.

County	Antrim	Armagh	Down	Fermanagh	Londonderry	Tyrone
<b>Fifes</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Drums</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Both</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Drumming Association</b>	Co. Antrim	Ulster	Armagh and Down	No	Mid-Ulster	Mid-Ulster

Lambeg drums are very heavy! A complete drum can weigh as much as **23** bags of sugar!



That's \_\_\_\_\_ kgs or \_\_\_\_\_ lbs!

They are also the loudest drums in the world. They can be as loud as **120** decibels, which is louder than a small aeroplane!

**Tutor Comments:**



## 2. Construction and Assembling of the Lambeg Drum



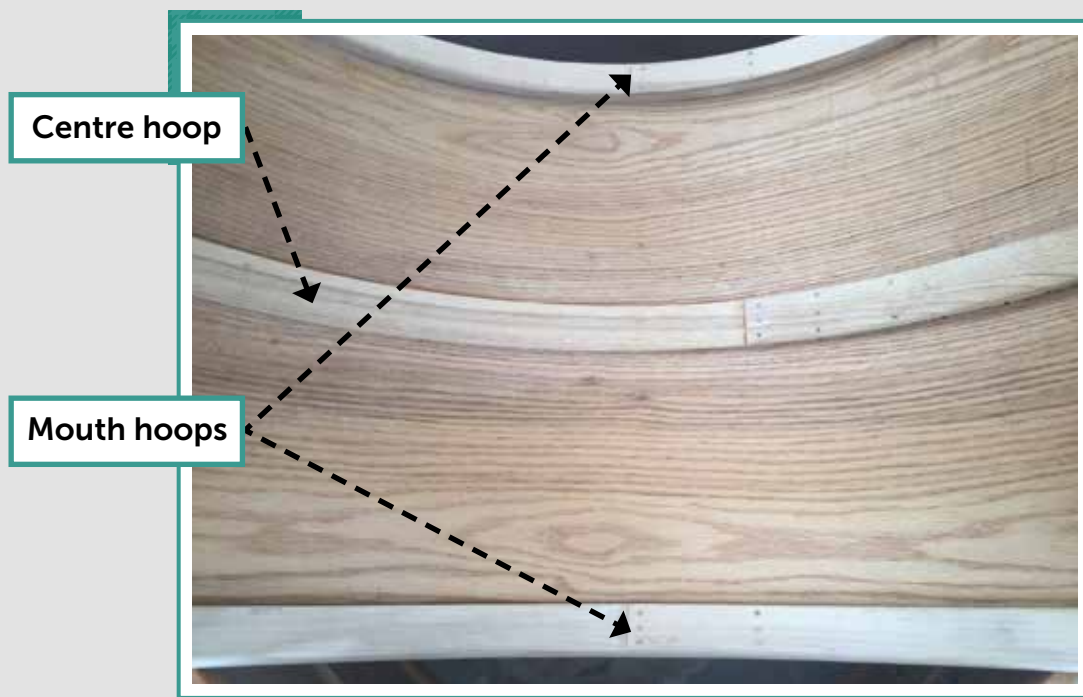
### 2a: Construction

A Lambeg drum has a number of different parts. The main part is the largest part of the drum: **the shell**. The straight plank of wood is put in a device called a **steam box** so that it becomes pliable and can be bent. When the wood is ready to be bent, it goes onto another device called **a rounder**, which makes the straight plank into the round, circular shape we need for a drum. This process has remained virtually **unchanged** for the last 100 years.

To form our drum, we need **two** of these steamed planks, which we then **join** together. The main type of wood used to make the shell is **oak**. Sometimes **ash** and **mahogany** are used as well.

The **two** pieces are joined by another piece of wood, called the **centre hoop**, to give strength.

On the outside, there are two more pieces of wood. They are called the **mouth hoops**.



This drum is made in a different way. Instead of using two long pieces of wood, it is made from seven or eight pieces of oak stuck together, a bit like a **barrel**.

This type of drum is called a **stave** shell. This type of drum-making process stopped in the mid-late 1800s.



## 2b: Assembling the Drum

The next part of the drum construction is arguably the most important and gives the drum that distinctive sound.

They are the two '**skins**', which are sometimes called '**heads**'.

They are made from **two female goat skins**.

The old timers used to say they have to be **kept apart to stop them from fighting!**

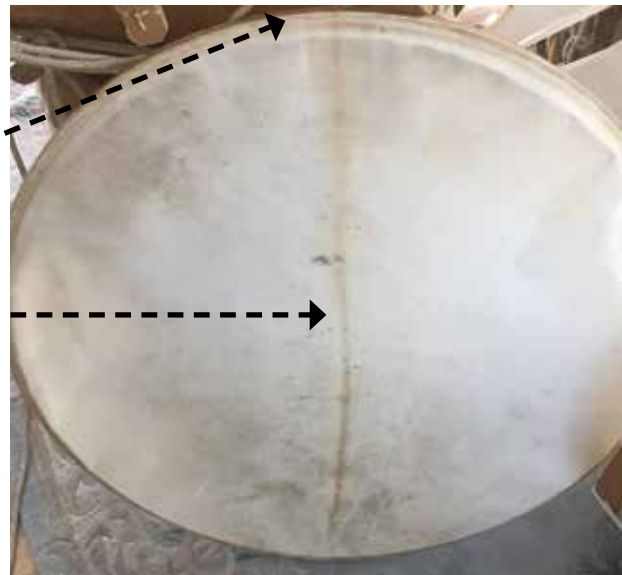




When they are wet, the **skins** are **lapped** onto **flesh hoops** and are ready to go on the drum.

This is the **flesh hoop**.

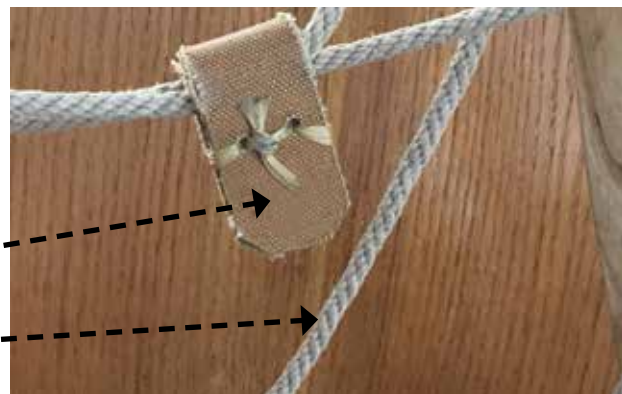
The dark line up the middle of the skin is the **backbone** or **spine** of the goat. Drumhead makers always line the **backbone** up the centre.



The last part is used to tighten the drum. They are called **buffs** and can be made of leather or sometimes very strong belt material.

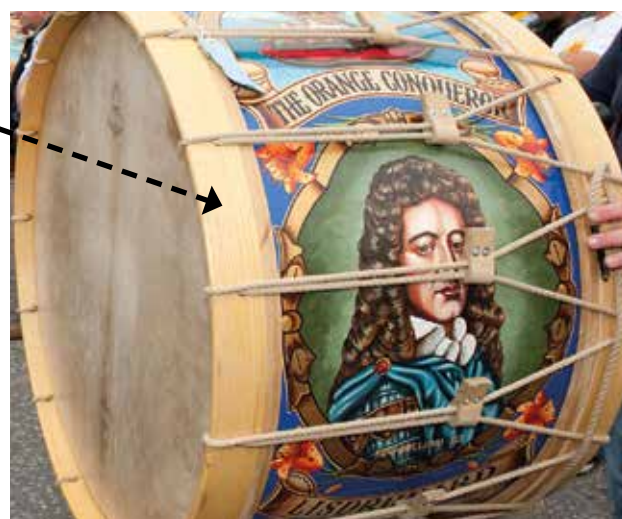
These are the **buffs**.

This is the **rope**.

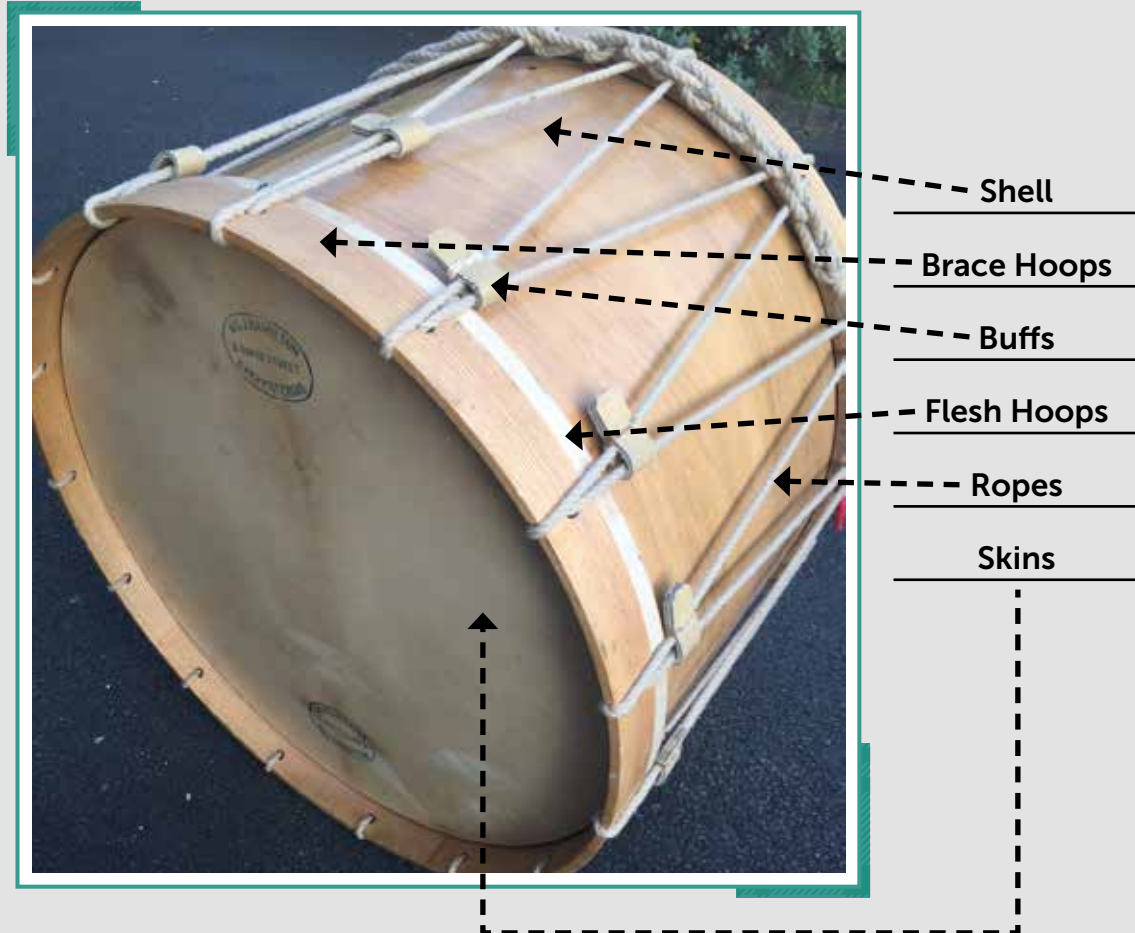


The **ropes** and **buffs** work together along with the **brace hoops** to tighten the **skins** around the **shell**.

When we put all these parts together, we end up with this ...



Can you remember all the different parts?



Tutor Comments:



### 3. Performance Techniques and Drumming Styles Associated with the Lambeg Drum



#### 3a: Performance Techniques

For many years, the drums were played with beaters like these – wooden beaters with wooden tops.



Then one day ... the top broke and fell off!

We ended up with these!

These sticks are made from **malacca** cane. They are very flexible and very strong, and make the drum sound much louder!

This cane is grown in countries in Asia. It is becoming more and more difficult to obtain!

The unusual thing about this type of cane is ...

it does not grow up:  
it grows **down**!





### 3b: Competition Drumming

This is where drummers compete against each other to see who has the best drum.



Each drum goes in front of the judges usually three times. These are called **rounds**. Drumming matches or competitions take place every week, usually on a Saturday, from late February until November.

Judges are looking for a drum that has a nice high pitch, yet has a solid '**middle**' sound and nice **tone**. Both skins need to have as close to the same sound as possible. This process is called **levelling**.





The aim of the game at competition drumming is to get the drum as **tight** as possible without it **bursting** or **breaking** to achieve the best sound possible.

The drums are tightened in a machine called a **press**. This **squeezes** the **skins** and allows the operator to gather **slack** rope when the **tension** is increased.



#### JULY

Sat. 2nd	Association Cup Galgrom
Sat. 9th	Doagh H. McGuigan Memorial Cup Juniors
Sat. 16th	Larne Juniors
Sat. 23rd	Dundrod Harkness Mem Juniors
Sat. 30th	Markethill 5pm

#### AUGUST

Sat. 6th	Crewe Reid Mem Juniors
Fri. 12th	Kellswater
Sat. 20th	Ballymarlow
Fri. 26th	Doagh Drumming Club

#### SEPTEMBER

Sat. 3rd	Broughshane Juniors
Sat. 10th	Ahoghill Millar Memorial
Sat. 17th	Burnside Open Day 2.30pm
Sat. 24th	Dundrod Broomhedge Juniors

#### OCTOBER

Sat. 1st	Ahoghill B Steele Memorial
Sat. 8th	Ballymarlow LOL 637
Sat. 15th	Ahoghill
Sat. 22nd	Memorial Shields

There are a number of drumming associations:  
Co. Antrim, Lagan Valley, Ulster, Armagh and Down, and Mid-Ulster.

A lot of preparation is needed before a drum is ready to go to a competition.

We start with all the different parts.



We check that there are no marks or holes, and make sure everything is even.

We pull the ropes to tighten everything.







Just time for a quick tune up outside before we set off for the match.

This is us at the competition. We use the **mallet** to make sure both sides of the drum sound the same. This is called **levelling** the drum.



After all the preparation, we are ready to go to the judges.

At the end of the competition, we all enjoy a cup of tea – even the drum!



### 3c: 'Time' Drumming

Time drumming is where drummers play set rhythms to a musical tune played on the **fife**. The main area for this type of drumming is North Antrim.



In some parts of the province, mainly Co. **Down**, the **fife** and **rattly** is played along with the Lambeg drum. The **fife** and **rattly** is a throwback to the early fifes and drums talked about at the start of this booklet.





Different parts of the country have their own rhythms.

Larne, Ballymoney and Ballymena are popular fifeing and drumming areas, and each location has its own unique drumming times.

**Single time** is popular around the Ballymena area and has been traditionally drummed to the fifeing tune '**100 Pipers**'.

In places like Co. **Armagh**, the drummers will play their rhythm without fifes. They have their own version of single time, but there are no fifes involved.



Tutor Comments:



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